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The Effects of Family Structure on Juvenile Delinquency

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Criminal Justice and Criminology

by

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ABSTRACT

The Effects of Family Structure on Juvenile Delinquency

by

Alisha Parks

Studies show that family structure is an important factor in explaining delinquency among adolescents (Price & Kunz, 2003). There is a lack of research, however, pertaining to cohabitation. The main goals of this study are to determine if there are variations in delinquency between cohabitating and other family types, and to examine the extent to which parental social control measures account for the variation in delinquency by family structure. Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) are used for the purposes of this study ($n = 4,389$). While there are no significant differences in violent delinquency between cohabitating families and other family types, results indicate that adolescents from cohabitating families have a greater odds of engaging in nonviolent delinquency compared to those from 2-biological-parent families, although reaching only marginal significance. This difference, however, is explained once parental social control factors are accounted for in the models.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Family Structure and Delinquency	7
Family Processes and Delinquency.....	11
The Interrelationships Between Family Structure, Family Processes, and Delinquency	15
3. METHODOLOGY	17
Research Questions	17
Data and Sample	18
Measurement	19
Dependent Variables	19
Independent Variables	19
Control Variables	21
Analytic Strategy	21
4. RESULTS	23
Background Literature	23
Descriptive Statistics	24
Multivariate Models.....	26
Nonviolent Delinquency	26
Violent Delinquency	29

Conclusions	31
5. DISCUSSION	33
Discussion and Conclusions	33
Limitations	36
Policy Implications.....	37
REFERENCES	39
VITA	42

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency is becoming very prevalent in today's society. In 2008 there were 6,318 arrests for every 100,000 youths age 10 to 17 in the resident population (Law Enforcement and Juvenile Crime, 2008). In 2009 juvenile courts in the United States handled an estimated 1.5 million delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations (Law Enforcement and Juvenile Crime, 2008). Moreover, delinquency is more prevalent today than in the past, as juvenile courts handled 30% more cases in 2009 than in 1985 (Knoll & Sickmund, 2012). While it may be that adolescents are being processed through the system more today rather than actually committing more forms of crime and delinquency (Puzzanchera, Adams, & Sickmund, 2010), adolescents are nonetheless experiencing increased involvement with the criminal justice system creating problems for parents, schools, communities, and other children who are in the presence of juvenile delinquents. In 1960 approximately 1,100 delinquency cases were processed daily. In 2007 juvenile courts handled about 4,600 delinquency cases per day (Puzzanchera et al., 2010).

Two of the main factors influencing juvenile delinquency are the family structure that a child is exposed to (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008; Price & Kunz, 2003) and the relationships adolescents have with parents (Leiber, Mack, & Featherstone, 2009; Petts, 2009). As with patterns of juvenile delinquency, family structure in the United States has also changed dramatically over the last century, becoming very diverse in today's society (Kierkus, Johnson, & Hewitt, 2010). Adolescents of all ages are living in many various types of homes, such as with single, married, and cohabiting parents. The families that children grow up in and the social environment in which they live can have major effects on their well-being (Wallman, 2010). In

general, children living in nontraditional households are at a greater risk for a wide variety of negative outcomes including involvement in delinquency (Price & Kunz, 2003) compared to those from married households (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Children in different family structures also experience many forms of monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment they receive from their parents (Hoeve, 2009). These factors may also play a role in determining why adolescents turn to juvenile delinquency.

This study uses data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to examine if there is a difference in delinquency by family structure. It also assesses if monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment account for differences in delinquency by family structure. While previous research has examined how family processes may explain differences in the relationship between family structure and delinquency (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Price & Kunz, 2003), a major contribution of this study is the exploration of the extent to which cohabitating families differ from two-biological-parent and other family types.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Structure and Delinquency

There is an abundance of research that examines the impact of family structure on delinquency (Amato & Keith, 1991; Price & Kunz, 2003; Rankin, 1983). The majority of research finds that youth from broken homes report increased levels of delinquency. For example, in a longitudinal survey of 411 males living in South London, Juby and Farrington (2001) found that delinquency rates were higher among 75 boys who were living in nonintact homes compared to boys living in intact families. Moreover, Price and Kunz (2003) conducted a meta-analysis involving 72 studies that involved divorce and juvenile delinquency. The results indicated that children from divorced homes have higher rates of delinquency (status offenses, crimes against person, felony theft, general delinquency, tobacco and drug use) compared to children from intact homes, with the exception of alcohol use.

Some have questioned the causal relationship, arguing that there may be a genetic trait common among children from divorced families that increase the risk of delinquency (Guo, Roettger, & Shih, 2006). Recent research, however, failed to support this view. Specifically, Burt, Barnes, McGue, & Lacono (2009) examined if parental divorce or genes that are inherited are the cause of delinquency. From a sample of 610 adoptive and biological families, they found that it is the experience of parental divorce, and not common genes, that drives the association between divorce and adolescent delinquency. This study shows that juvenile delinquency is not hereditary, but it can be linked to parental divorce.

While past research has demonstrated that children raised in traditional, two-parent families experience a lower risk of delinquency than children from alternative family types (Free,

1991; Rankin, 1983), the understanding of whether this effect is universal remains imperfect (Kierkus & Hewitt, 2009). For example, using a national sample of adolescents between the ages of 12 to 17, Kierkus and Hewitt (2009) examined whether the link between nontraditional family structure and delinquency varies according to six distinct circumstances: gender, race, age, SES, family size, and place of residence. They found that gender, race, SES, and place of residence do not condition the relationship between family structure and delinquency. They did report, however, that age and family size impacted the relationship between family structure and crime and delinquency. Specifically, older adolescents and those from larger families were at a higher risk for participating in juvenile delinquency.

Since 1950 the American nuclear family has arguably undergone more change than at any other time in history (Kierkus et al., 2010). Much of the early research on family structure and delinquency focused on simplified measures of family structure that may mischaracterize the relationship between family structure and delinquency. For example, Rankin (1983) examined the relationship between broken homes and delinquency among two samples of U.S. children interviewed in 1967 and 1972. He found that when family context is operationalized as a simple dichotomy (broken versus intact homes), broken homes are more strongly associated with “family” offenses such as running away and truancy than with other types of more serious juvenile misconduct. Rankin says studies that suggest broken homes are not an important causal factor are misleading because of their inadequate operational definitions of both family context and delinquency.

Moreover, there is evidence that there is a great degree of variability within “broken home” families (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008; Demuth & Brown, 2004). One third of all children are born to unmarried mothers and over one half of children will spend some time in a single-parent

family (Demuth & Brown, 2004). In fact, single-father families are the fastest growing family form (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Family structures are extremely varied today not only due to the high rate of divorce and the proliferation of complex stepfamilies but also to increasing rates of nonmarital childbearing and cohabitation (Demuth & Brown, 2004).

More recent research has looked specifically at how cohabitation is related to delinquency. In general, studies find children who live in cohabitating households are much more likely to participate in juvenile delinquency compared to those in two-biological-parent households (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008; Kierkus, 2010; Manning & Lamb, 2003). Apel and Kaukinen (2008) conducted a study on the relationships between family structure and antisocial behavior that focused on parental cohabitation and blended households using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. They found considerable heterogeneity in the risk of antisocial and delinquent behavior among groups of youth who reside in what are traditionally dichotomized as intact and nonintact families. In particular, Apel and Kaukinen found that youth in “intact” families differ in important ways depending on whether the two biological parents are married or cohabitating and on whether they have children from a previous relationship. For example, if the two biological parents are married, the child is less likely to engage in criminal activity. If the biological parents are only cohabitating, youth are more likely to engage in antisocial behavior. In addition, they found that youth who reside with a single biological parent who cohabits with a nonbiological partner exhibit an unusually high rate of antisocial behavior, especially if the custodial parent is the biological father.

Similarly, Manning and Lamb (2003) examined the well-being and delinquency of adolescents in cohabitating stepparent families using national data from Add Health. Their research showed that teens living with cohabitating stepparents often fare worse than teens living

with two-biological parents in terms of well-being and delinquency. In fact, teenagers living with single unmarried mothers were found to be similar to teens living with cohabitating stepparents in terms of levels of well-being and delinquency.

Similar to the research by Manning and Lamb (2003), a study conducted by Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2002) also found that children who live in single-parent or cohabitating families show higher signs of delinquency than those who live in intact and noncohabitating families. This study examined if family structure affects childhood delinquency. They found that single parenthood does reduce the well-being of children. Cohabitation, however, is only associated with delinquency and not the well-being of a child. In other words, this study shows that single parent families and cohabitation can affect children and influence if they will participate in juvenile delinquency or not and it also shows that single parenthood does reduce the well-being of children, but cohabitation does not.

A particularly important factor to delinquency may, therefore, be the presence or absence of a father figure in the household. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Comanor and Phillips (2002) did research to determine if nontraditional family structure, particularly caused by divorce, affected delinquency. They concluded that the single most important factor affecting delinquency is the presence of a father in the home (Comanor & Phillips, 2002). This research corroborates other studies looking at broken homes but suggests that children from single-mother households may be at particular risk.

Using data from Add Health, Demuth and Brown (2004) extended prior research that has investigated the effects of growing up in a two-parent versus single-mother family by examining adolescent delinquency in single-father families too. This strategy helped the researchers to identify whether the effect is predominantly a function of parental absence (i.e., one versus two

parents) or parental gender (i.e., single mother versus single father) (Demuth & Brown, 2004). The results indicated that adolescents in single-parent families were significantly more delinquent than their counterparts residing with two biological, married parents (Demuth & Brown, 2004). They also, however, found a difference in single mother and single father families. Children from single father families showed higher signs of delinquency than those adolescents from single mother families. Adolescents from single parent families do show higher signs of juvenile delinquency overall, compared to children from intact families.

Family Processes and Delinquency

One theoretical perspective that can explain the relationship between family structure and delinquency is social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). The main tenet of this theory is that increased social bonds decrease the likelihood of engaging in crime and deviance. Specifically, Hirschi (1969) specifies four elements of the social bond: attachment, described as the extent that a person has close affectionate ties with others; commitment, described as the fear of law-breaking behavior; involvement, described as meaning participating in conventional acts to make one too busy to commit crime; and belief, described as impressions or opinions that are highly dependent upon social reinforcement.

Hirschi's (1969) version of social control theory contends that individuals conform because they have strong affective attachments to parents, stakes in conformity, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in social norms. Conversely, those youth who have weak attachments, low stakes in conformity, little involvement in conventional activities, and poor attitudes regarding societal norms are more likely to participate in delinquent behavior. Hirschi originally argued that the attachment between parent and child is paramount and the strength of

this relationship is the most important factor in determining delinquent behavior. In other words, it is the quality, and not the quantity, of bonds that determines delinquency (Leiber et al., 2009).

Many children who experience a divorce or are otherwise in nontraditional families may not be as close to their parents as children in two-biological-parent families. They may experience weakened bonds with their parents and others, thus increasing the likelihood that they will engage in crime and delinquency (Matsueda & Heimer, 1987). If a child lives in a nontraditional family structure, this can impact the four elements of the bond. Hirschi suggested that inadequate families fail to provide the attachments that could leverage children into socialized life-styles (Hirschi, 1969). If a child is brought up in a broken home, the child is going to have a hard time socially and this may cause the child to turn to deviant acts.

Parental attachment can, therefore, be a key factor in explaining crime and delinquency among adolescents. A study by Grove and Crutchfield (1982) examined the effect of various “family variables” on the etiology of juvenile delinquency focusing on self-reports by parents on their child’s behavior. Some of the potential explanations for delinquency in this study were: family structure, poor parental characteristics, household characteristics, and parent-child relationships. Of these factors, they found parental attachment to be the strongest predictor of delinquency. In addition, research using nationally representative data has found that maternal attachment was an especially important predictor of nonserious and serious delinquency irrespective of family structure, economic factors, and race and ethnicity (Leiber et al., 2009).

While children from single parent homes can certainly have strong attachments with the custodial parent, some research has suggested that having a second parent in the household is still important in reducing delinquency. For example, Rankin and Kern (1994) found that children who are strongly attached to both parents have a lower probability of self-reported

delinquency than children who are strongly attached to only one parent. Furthermore, even children living in single-parent homes who are strongly attached to the custodial parent generally have a greater probability of committing delinquent acts than children living in intact homes who are strongly attached to both parents (Rankin & Kern, 1994).

In addition to parental attachment or closeness, social bonds with parents have also been measured with terms such as parental monitoring, supervision, and involvement. Of these, parental monitoring and supervision have received much support in the literature (Hoeve et al., 2009; Keijsers, Branje, VanderValk, & Meeus, 2010; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Cirss, 2001). For example, Hoeve et al. (2009) examined the factors that impact why family structures cause crime and delinquency. Their meta-analysis of 161 published and unpublished manuscripts determined that the strongest links connecting this relationship were parental monitoring, psychological control, and negative aspects of support (Hoeve et al., 2009). This meta-analysis has demonstrated that a significant relationship exists between parenting and delinquency and confirms previous research that behavioral control, such as parental monitoring is negatively linked to delinquency (Patterson & Yoeger, 1993). Furthermore, several specific indicators of parental monitoring including parental knowledge, child disclosure, and active monitoring by parents have links to delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009).

With respect to parental involvement, some studies show that more time spent with parents leads to less participation in crime and delinquency (Keijsers et al., 2010). The more leisure time that an adolescent spends with parents, the less likely the adolescent is to deviate. If an adolescent spends more time away from parents, he or she is more likely to disclose information from authority figures and keep things from his or her parents (Keijsers et al., 2010). In addition, Eitle (2005) found that the quantity of parenting may provide additional protection

against adolescent substance use beyond quality of parenting factors. In other words, the more frequent adolescents are supervised, the less likely they are to engage in crime and delinquency.

Parenting practices may also impact delinquency over the long term. Petts (2009) used a life-course approach to examine whether family influences individual-level delinquency trajectories from early adolescence through young adulthood. Based on data from the NLSY79, results suggested that residing with two parents deters youths from becoming delinquent and that supportive parenting practices reduce their likelihood of becoming involved in delinquent behavior early in adolescence (Petts, 2009). This study shows that parenting may have long-term effects on crime and deviance and parenting practices impact delinquency across different ages.

The gender of the child may also impact the relationship between parenting practices and delinquency. Considering the gender of the child, Gove and Crutchfield (1982) found that the variables that predict male delinquency were different from those that predict female delinquency. Characteristics of the parents' marriage, such as if the parents get along with each other or not, play an important role for boys, while misbehavior of girls is more strongly predicted by variables measuring parent-child interaction and parental control. Females were more likely to engage in crime and delinquency if they did not have a lot of interaction with their parents and if their parents did not control and monitor what they are doing. The principle predictor of female delinquency in this study was, therefore, the parent's family management and techniques (supervision and discipline) (Loeber & Dishion, 1983). Put differently, supervision and monitoring may be an especially important predictor of delinquency for female adolescents compared to male adolescents.

The gender of the parent may also be an important factor in predicting delinquency, especially maternal relationships with children. Maternal relationships in particular appear to be

important with regards to crime and delinquency. For example, maternal behavior may influence crime and delinquency and, through those effects, adult criminality. If a mother does not pay close attention to her child, the child may turn to delinquency. Parental interaction with the family, however, appears to have a more direct influence on the probability of adult criminal behavior (McCord, 1991). McCord found that children who are brought up in families where they are closely supervised and have interaction are less likely to turn into criminals as adults (Petts, 2009). Practicing good parenting and closely supervising an adolescent can influence the adolescent not to participate in crime throughout adulthood, also (Petts, 2009). Parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment appear to be especially important in the case of an adolescent participating in crime and delinquency (McCord, 1991).

The Interrelationships Between Family Structure, Family Processes, and Delinquency

Research shows that two-biological-parent families have higher levels of parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment when compared to other family types. For example, Laursen (2005) conducted research to determine if household structures differ in conflicts between mothers and adolescents. The family structure categories examined were single mother, two-biological-parent, and blended families. The author found that adolescents reported more total disagreements with single mothers and mothers of blended households than with mothers from two-biological-parent families (Laursen, 2005). Laursen concluded single-parent families restrict the number of people in the household available to discipline, monitor, or supervise the adolescent. Two-biological-parent families provide more support, involvement, and monitoring for an adolescent.

Also, research by Fisher, Leve, O'Leary, and Leve (2003) reiterates that parental monitoring is higher in two-biological-parent families. Fisher et al. (2003) conducted a study to

determine the levels of parental monitoring among three different categories: two-biological-parent families, stepmother families, and stepfather families. This study showed that two-biological-parent families exhibit higher signs of parental monitoring when compared to the other family types and that children's behavior is better in two-biological-parent families.

Given the importance of parenting practices to predicting delinquency, these factors may account for the relationship between family structure and delinquency. Some research has previously examined the extent to which family processes such as parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment can mediate the impact of family structure and delinquency. For example, Demuth and Brown (2004) found that adolescents in single parent households are more delinquent than youth in married households, but that these differences are reduced once the authors account for various family processes such as monitoring and closeness. In other words, if parenting practices lend to increased levels of social control, an adolescent is less likely to engage in crime and deviance. In contrast, Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2002) found that there was no evidence to indicate that parenting practices mediated the links between family structure and children's outcomes. One potential explanation for the conflicting results could be due to the different sample in each study. Demuth and Brown (2004) collected data from children who had mothers of all ages and their sample was nationally representative. On the other hand, Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2002) collected data from children who were born when their mothers were between the ages of 14 and 21 and their sample was regional.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
Research Questions

Previous research has demonstrated that youth from nontraditional families are more likely to engage in crime and delinquency (Price & Kunz, 2003). Recent research focusing on more varied forms of family structure such as cohabitation have largely found similar results—that youth in two-biological-parent families experience lower levels of crime and delinquency compared to others (Demuth & Brown, 2004). This study will further investigate differences in offending among adolescents between two-biological-parent households and varied family structures such as cohabitation, single-mother, and single-father households. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is that youth from cohabitating families will have higher levels of delinquency compared to others.

Research has also shown that increased parental social control is related to decreased levels of crime and delinquency among adolescents (Leiber et al., 2009), and that adolescents from two-parent family structures report higher levels of social control. It is, therefore, likely that any differences in adolescent involvement in crime and delinquency by family structure will largely be due to differences in social control. While producing mixed support, there is some evidence that parental social control does indeed mediate the relationships between family structure and delinquency (Leiber et al., 2009; McCord, 1991). The second hypothesis is, therefore, that differences in delinquency by family structure will be accounted for by parental social control as measured by parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment.

Data and Sample

This study uses public data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Add Health is a nationally representative, longitudinal study of adolescents. The original sampling frame included youth attending a total of 145 junior high and high schools. Students in grades 7-12 were stratified by grade and sex and randomly selected to participate in the longitudinal sample. Wave I encompasses all data collection between 1994 and 1995. The sample consisted of 20,745 adolescents in the United States during the 1994-1995 school year. In-home interviews were conducted with each respondent between April and December of 1995. The response rate was 78.9%. Wave II data consist of follow-up in home interviews with the same adolescents who were interviewed in the Wave I data collection, except for those who were seniors at Wave I. All of the follow-up interviews were collected in 1996. The sample for the second wave was 15,000 respondents and had a response rate of 88.2%. Subsequent in-home interviews were collected in 2001-2002 and 2008-2009. Respondents were all administered the same interview and all of the data were recorded on laptop computers. The in-home interviews were conducted using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) and Audio Computer-Assisted Self Interviewing (ACASI). ACASI was used to ask more personal questions.

This study focuses on family structure, parenting, and delinquency in adolescence. For this reason only Waves I and II from the public data are used for the purposes of the present study as this is the age which respondents are still in high school. The analytic sample consists of 4,389 adolescents.

Measurement

Dependent Variables

Both nonviolent and violent delinquency are the focal dependent variables for this study. *Nonviolent delinquency* is based on several questions from Wave II that ask how many times in the past 12 months the adolescent had engaged in the following activities: graffiti; damaged property; stole something worth more than 50 dollars; stole something worth less than 50 dollars; stole from a store; drove a stolen car; entered home to steal; or sold drugs. Responses for each item range from 0 (never) to 3 (5 or more times). Due to the highly skewed nature of the scale (65.4% did not engage in any nonviolent delinquency), a dichotomized measure of nonviolent delinquency was created such that any nonviolent delinquency was coded as 1 and no involvement in nonviolent delinquency as 0. The Chronbach Alpha is .797.

Similarly, a measure for *violent delinquency* is based on Wave II questions that ask how often the adolescent engaged in the following activities within the last 30 days: a serious fight; sent someone to the hospital; threatened someone with a weapon; used a weapon; or been in a group fight. Responses range from 0 (never) to 3 (more than 5 times). Due to the highly skewed nature of the scale (71.0% did not engage in any violent delinquency), a dichotomized measure of violent delinquency was created such that any violent delinquency was coded as 1 and no involvement in violent delinquency as 0. The Chronbach Alpha is .749.

Independent Variables

One of the main independent variables in this study is *family structure*. Because prior research has called for more elaborate measures of family structure (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2002; Manning & Lamb, 2003), special attention is paid to family forms beyond the simple "traditional" and "nontraditional" categories. Family structures are, therefore, measured

using the following categories: two biological parents; two parents (meaning one is nonbiological); cohabitating; single parent; and other.

Other main independent variables are social control measures. For the social control variables of monitoring, involvement, and attachment, information is taken separately for both parents. This is accounted for by summing the results together from the resident mother and father social control variables and then taking the mean of the summed number. For single-parent families, only the value from the residing parents was used.

Parental supervision is measured by creating a mean of responses that question how often parents are home when the adolescent goes to school, returns home from school, and goes to bed. Each question ranges from 0 to 7. Zero corresponds to never and seven corresponds to always. The Chronbach Alpha is .592.

Parental monitoring is measured by taking the mean of responses to several questions that are asked about parental monitoring. The questions ask the respondents whether the parental figure of the household lets the respondents make their own decision about the following statements: what they wear; what they eat; the people they hang around with; which television programs they watch; how much television they watch; the time they must be home on weekend nights; and what time they go to bed on week nights. The measure ranges from 0 to 4. Zero corresponds to never and four corresponds to always. The Chronbach Alpha is .360.

To measure *parental attachment*, each respondent was asked the following questions about the parental figure in the household: how close do you feel to your mother-father; most of the time your mother-father is warm and loving to you; you are satisfied with the way your mother-father and you communicate with each other; and you are satisfied with your relationship with your mother-father. This is measured by taking the mean of all of the responses to these

questions. Each question ranges from 0 to 4. Zero corresponds to not at all and four corresponds to very much. The Chronbach Alpha is .868.

Parental involvement is measured by taking the mean of responses to several questions that are asked about parental involvement. The questions ask if the respondent has done the following things with their mother-father in the past 4 weeks: gone shopping, played a sport, gone to a religious service or church-related event, gone to a movie, play, museum, concert, or sports event, and worked on a project for school. This is a count measure that ranges from 0, involved in none of the above activities, to 5, involved in all of the above activities. The Chronbach Alpha is .630.

Control Variables

There are also several control variables in this study. *Race* is measured with the following categories: White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and other. *Age* is measured at the interval level. *Gender* is measured using a dummy variable for female. *Socioeconomic status* is measured separately for the mother and father and then the mean is taken between the two sums. Only the value of the residing parent is used for adolescents in single-parent households. This variable scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning less than high school, 2 corresponding to high school graduate, 3 meaning finished some college, 4 meaning graduated college, and 5 corresponding to more than college.

Analytic Strategy

This study uses binary logistic regression in SPSS to test each hypothesis as the dependent variables are both dichotomous. Although separate analyses are conducted for violent and nonviolent delinquency outcomes, each follows the same series of models discussed below. Listwise deletion is used to delete any cases with missing information.

The first model tests to see if there are differences in delinquency by family structure. Specifically, each family type is entered into the model, with the cohabitating parent family type serving as the contrast group. The second model tests to see if the social control measures account for the differences between family structure and juvenile delinquency by adding parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment into the models. All models include a number of key control variables (age, race or ethnicity, sex, etc.).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Background Literature

Previous research has shown that children from intact homes are less delinquent than youth from broken and divorced homes (Juby & Farrington, 2001; Price & Kunz, 2003). Family formations, however, are much more complex than to be identified as simply broken or intact, and some have argued that delinquency research should reflect this (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008; Demuth & Brown, 2004). In particular, cohabitating, divorced, and single-parent families should be distinguished from one another to better isolate potential differences in delinquency from married families. Recent research that has focused on more diverse family types has found that youth living in cohabitating and blended households have higher signs of delinquency than those living in two-biological parent families (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008; Manning & Lamb, 2003), as do youth residing in single-parent families (Demuth & Brown, 2004).

Research has also shown that parenting factors such as monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment reduce the likelihood of adolescents participating in crime and delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009; Keijsers et al., 2010; Petts, 2009). Moreover, Demuth and Brown (2004) found that family processes reduce the likelihood of delinquency no matter what the family type. In other words, delinquency is reduced when accounting for parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment no matter what type of family an adolescent lives in. Differences in delinquency between two-biological-parent families and other family types are accounted for by family process measures (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Yet to be examined, however, is the extent to which differences in delinquency between cohabitation and two-biological-parent families are also accounted for by the same set of social control factors.

The first hypothesis of this study is that adolescents from cohabitating families will have higher signs of delinquency than those from other family types. The second hypothesis is that differences in delinquency by family structure will be accounted for by parental social control measures including monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment. This study uses binary logistic regression in SPSS to test the validity of each hypothesis. The first model tests to see if there are differences in juvenile delinquency by family structure. Specifically, each family type is inserted into the model, with the cohabitating parent family type serving as the contrast group. The second model tests to see if the social control measures account for any differences in juvenile delinquency by family structure by adding parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment into the models.

Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1 means and frequencies are reported. The mean age of respondents in this study is 15.61, a little over half of the sample is female (52.5%), the majority of the sample is White (62.0%), and the mean parent socioeconomic status is 2.77. This number is near the middle of the scale, as expected, and indicates that most respondents' parents have only a high school education between the two parents. These numbers are expected because the data are from a nationally representative sample.

Focusing on the main independent variables, family structure, Table 1 shows that most respondents reported living in a household with two biological parents (66.2%), 3.1% live in a two-parent family, respondents living in cohabitating families only account for 2.3%, about one fourth of respondents live in single-parent families (25.2%), and 3.2% of respondents live in any "other" type of family structure. For the variables that are expected to be in the mediation process, the mean level of parental monitoring is 2.79, the mean level of parental attachment is

3.26, the mean level of parental involvement is 1.54, and the mean level of parental supervision is 1.94. The mean level of parental monitoring and parental attachment are high, judging by the scale that ranges from 0 to 4 for both variables. This means parents exhibit a lot of parental monitoring and attachment among every family structure and this lowers delinquency rates. Parental involvement and supervision are low on the scale, with the scales ranging from 0 to 5 and 0 to 7 respectively. Almost never would correspond to 1.5 on the parental involvement scale as well as the parental supervision scale. This means that parents do not exhibit a lot of involvement and supervision as measured in this study.

Looking at the two main dependent variables, only 34.6% of respondents reported being involved in nonviolent delinquency. Respondents have been involved in violent delinquency by 29%. Both of the percentages for the delinquency variables are relatively low, but are as expected given that Add Health is a general sample of adolescents in high school.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics (n = 4,389)*

Variable	Mean or Frequency	SD	Range or <i>n</i>
Nonviolent delinquency	34.6	-----	1,520
Violent delinquency	29.0	-----	1,271
Parental monitoring	2.79	0.70	0.00 – 4.00
Parental attachment	3.26	0.70	0.00 – 4.00
Parental involvement	1.54	1.06	0.00 – 5.00
Parental supervision	1.94	1.53	0.00 – 7.00
Two biological parent	66.2	-----	2,905
Two parent family	3.1	-----	137
Cohabitation	2.3	-----	101
Single parent family	25.2	-----	1,104
Other family type	3.2	-----	142
Age	15.61	1.57	12.00–21.00
Female	52.5	-----	2,303
White	62.0	-----	2,723
Hispanic	10.0	-----	440
African American	22.1	-----	971
Asian	3.3	-----	143
American Indian/Other race	2.2	-----	97
Socioeconomic status	2.77	1.14	1.00 - 5.00

Multivariate Models

Nonviolent Delinquency

The first model from Table 2 illustrates the relationship between family structure and nonviolent delinquency outcomes. Results show that for every one unit increase of age there is a decreased odds of 6.3% ($(1 - 0.937) * 100 = 6.3$) for being involved in nonviolent delinquency. Females also report a 39.2% decrease in odds of being involved in nonviolent delinquency compared to males. Compared to Whites, Hispanics have an increase in odds of participating in nonviolent delinquency by 36.4%. Also, compared to Whites, the “other race” category has an increase in odds of nonviolent delinquency by 69.0%.

Turning to the key independent variables, results reveal that there is a marginally significant difference in nonviolent delinquency between adolescents from two-biological-parent families and those from cohabitating families. In particular, adolescents from two-biological-

parent families report a 31.3% decrease in odds of participating in nonviolent delinquency compared to those from cohabitating households. Adolescents from each of the other family types did not significantly vary from cohabitating families in terms of nonviolent delinquency.

Model 2 in Table 2 shows the extent to which the differences in delinquency and family structure are accounted for by adding social control mechanisms to the analysis. Results show that increases in parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment are related to decreased odds in nonviolent delinquency. Households that exhibit higher levels of parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment show lower signs of adolescents participating in any form of crime and delinquency. Parental supervision does not have a significant effect on nonviolent delinquency.

Although only reaching marginal significance to begin with, adolescents who live in cohabitating families no longer report significantly different odds of engaging in nonviolent delinquency compared to those from two-biological-parent families once the social control mechanisms are added to the model. Moreover, the two-biological-parent coefficient changes from -0.375 to -0.350, resulting in roughly a 7% reduction $[(1 - (-0.350 / -0.375)) * 100]$ when accounting for social control measures. This means that the small degree of variation in nonviolent delinquency between adolescents from cohabitating and two-biological-parent families is explained or mediated by the social control factor.

Table 2. *Logistic Regression of Family Structure on Nonviolent Delinquency, Mediation by Social Control Processes (n = 4,389)*

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp (<i>b</i>)	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp (<i>b</i>)
Two biological parent family	-0.375†	0.209	0.687	-0.350	0.213	0.704
Two parent family	-0.236	0.273	0.790	-0.182	0.278	0.833
Single parent family	-0.190	0.215	0.827	-0.118	0.219	0.889
Other family type	0.119	0.269	1.126	0.179	0.274	1.196
Age	-0.065***	0.021	0.937	-0.120***	0.023	0.887
Female	-0.498***	0.064	0.608	-0.574***	0.066	0.563
Hispanic	0.311*	0.109	1.364	0.316**	0.111	1.372
African American	-0.100	0.084	0.905	-0.057	0.085	0.945
Asian	0.143	0.180	1.154	0.046	0.183	1.047
Other race	0.525*	0.210	1.690	0.540*	0.214	1.716
Socioeconomic status	0.037	0.029	1.037	0.044	0.031	1.045
Parental monitoring				-0.175***	0.048	0.839
Parental attachment				-0.371***	0.049	0.690
Parental involvement				-0.106**	0.043	0.900
Parental supervision				-0.014	0.023	0.987
Intercept	0.804	0.392	2.234	3.512	0.495	
Cox and Snell R^2	0.021			0.047		
-2 Log likelihood	5,568.280			5,451.424		

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Violent Delinquency

The models in Table 3 represent the relationship between family structures and violent delinquency outcomes. According to the first model in Table 1, for violent delinquency, for every one unit of age there is a decrease in odds of participating in violent delinquency by 7.4%. Females report a 55.6% reduction in odds of engaging in violent delinquency compared to males. In addition, compared to Whites, Hispanics have an increase in odds of participating in violent delinquency by 59.8%, African Americans have an increase in odds of being involved in violent delinquency by 36.7%, and the “other race” group has an increase in odds of participating in violent delinquency by 34.9%. For every one unit increase in parental education, there is a decrease in odds of participating in violent delinquency by 16.0%. Unlike before, there are not any significant or even marginally significant differences in odds of engaging in violent delinquency between adolescents residing in cohabitating families and all other family types.

The second model in Table 3 shows the extent to which the differences in delinquency and family structure are accounted for by adding social control mechanisms to the analysis. Results show that increases in parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment are related to decreased odds in violent delinquency. Households that exhibit higher levels of parental monitoring, supervision, and attachment show lower signs of adolescents participating in any violent form of crime and delinquency. Parental supervision does not have a significant effect on violent delinquency. The family structure variables predicting violent delinquency are also slightly reduced when incorporating the social control measures in Table 3, although none significantly varied from cohabitating families before the social control variables were employed.

Table 3. *Logistic Regression of Family Structure on Violent Delinquency, Mediation by Social Control Processes (n = 4,389)*

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp (<i>b</i>)	<i>b</i>	SE	Exp (<i>b</i>)
Two-biological parent family	-0.310	0.220	0.733	-0.321	0.222	0.726
Two parent family	0.072	0.283	1.075	0.102	0.285	1.107
Single Parent Family	-0.041	0.226	0.960	-0.003	0.228	0.997
Other family type	0.119	0.281	1.126	0.149	0.284	1.161
Age	-0.077***	0.022	0.926	-0.102***	0.024	0.903
Female	-0.812***	0.069	0.444	-0.857***	0.071	0.425
Hispanic	0.469***	0.113	1.598	0.465***	0.114	1.591
African American	0.313***	0.087	1.367	0.341***	0.088	1.406
Asian	0.261	0.194	1.298	0.185	0.195	1.203
Other race	0.854***	0.215	2.349	0.878***	0.217	2.406
Socioeconomic status	-0.174***	0.032	0.840	-0.168***	0.033	0.845
Parental monitoring				-0.157**	0.050	0.854
Parental attachment				-0.226***	0.052	0.798
Parental involvement				-0.087*	0.036	0.916
Parental supervision				0.034	0.024	1.035
Intercept	1.214	0.416	3.365	2.840	0.518	
Cox and Snell R^2	0.055			0.066		
-2 Log likelihood	5,035.013			4,982.763		

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Conclusions

The first hypothesis tested to see if youth from cohabitating families exhibit higher signs of delinquency compared to those from other family types. The results partially supported the first hypothesis. There was a marginal significance found that supported that youth from cohabitating families show higher signs of delinquency than youth from two-biological-parent families. This research counters other research that has found significant differences in delinquency between cohabitating and married families (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008). Perhaps one reason only marginal significance was observed is because the cohabitation group consisted of a small sample size. Also, when comparing delinquency rates among different family types, no differences were found for violent delinquency, but there was a difference found for nonviolent delinquency.

Unlike this study, previous literature states that youth from cohabitating and single-parent families vary significantly from adolescents from two-biological-parent families (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Previous literature also finds that adolescents in cohabitating families exhibit higher signs of delinquency when compared to other family types (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Cohabitating families in this study did not vary significantly from any other family type. There was only a marginal significance found that states that youth from cohabitating families show higher signs of delinquency compared to those from two-biological-parent families.

The second hypothesis tested to see if any differences in juvenile delinquency by family structure are accounted for by parental social control as measured by parental monitoring, supervision, involvement, and attachment. Partial support for the second hypothesis was again found. While parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment each significantly reduced the likelihood that youth will participate in crime and delinquency, these factors only accounted for

the difference between cohabitating and two-biological-parent families, which was marginally significant to begin with. The lack of significant variation in juvenile delinquency between cohabitating families and other family types limited the extent to which this second hypothesis could be tested.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Discussion and Conclusions

The main goal of this research paper is to determine if adolescents from cohabitating families vary from adolescents in other family types in terms of nonviolent and violent delinquency. The researcher also examined if social control factors such as parental monitoring, parental supervision, parental involvement, and parental attachment account for any differences in juvenile delinquency by family structure. Using public data from Add Health ($n = 4,389$) the researcher found that there is a marginally significant difference in nonviolent delinquency between adolescents from cohabitating families and two-biological-parent families, as youth from cohabiting families are more likely to participate in nonviolent delinquency compared to youth from two-biological-parent families. This difference, however, disappeared once parental social control factors were incorporated into the model.

Regarding the first hypothesis, that cohabitating families would significantly vary in delinquency compared to other family types, results partially supported this hypothesis. On the one hand, none of the family structure variables turned up significant differences when looking at violent delinquency. On the other hand, two-biological-parent family types were marginally significantly different when compared to cohabitating family types in the case of nonviolent delinquency. The results showed that adolescents from two-biological-parent families were less likely to participate in crime and deviance compared to youth from cohabitating families. Limited support was, therefore, found for the first hypothesis in this study due to the marginally significant difference in nonviolence between adolescents from cohabitating and two-biological-parent families being the only notable point of variation across outcomes.

The above findings show that delinquency rates are higher among youth from cohabitating families when compared to youth from two-biological-parent families, but only in the case of nonviolent delinquency. As expected, significance was not found between adolescents from cohabitating families, single-parent families, and two-parent families. This is probably because two-biological-parent families have more structure than the other family types discussed. Family members may come and go from cohabitating and two-parent families, but they will more than likely remain the same if the two parents are biological and married. Cohabitating families are marginally higher than two-biological-parent families but not different from any other family type.

Results indicate that the present study is not consistent with prior studies. For example, Apel and Kaukinen (2008) say that youth from cohabitating households show higher signs of delinquency than those from two-biological-parent families. The results of the present study only showed a marginal significance, unlike previous studies. One reason for this may be due to the size of the cohabitating category used in this study, as there were very few cases of cohabitating families that were used for the purposes of this study. Another reason may be due to how the variables of family structure were measured in each study. Apel and Kaukinen compared intact or married families against cohabitating families. Married or intact families were used as the contrast group and the authors found a significant difference as in cohabitating families exhibit higher signs of delinquency. Using the cohabiting family group as the contrast instead of two-biological-parent families or married families may be the reason why there are differences across studies.

It is also curious that cohabitating families only differ from two-biological-parent families with regard to nonviolent delinquency. More youth have participated in nonviolent

delinquency. Nonviolent delinquency is less serious than violent delinquency, so there may be more variation anticipated. This is different when compared to previous literature. One reason for this may be because other studies (Demuth & Brown, 2004) did not specify between nonviolent and violent delinquency. Previous literature only measured one variable, delinquency in general. This is more similar to the nonviolent delinquency measure used in this study that did produce marginally significant differences.

Partial support was also found for the second hypothesis, that differences between cohabitation and other family types would be explained by social control factors. While there was very little variability in delinquency between cohabitating families and other family types to begin with, what little variation that was observed in nonviolent delinquency was explained by the social control factors. Previous research focusing on using similar parenting factors to explain family structure variation in delinquency found inconsistent results. For example, Laursen (2005) found a significant difference between two-biological-parent families compared to other family types such as single-mother and blended families. Unlike the present study, the author found significant support for the fact the delinquency rates are lower in two-biological-parent families versus other family types when incorporating the social control variables into the model. The present study only found a marginal significance for this. One reason for this may be because other studies compared married or two-biological-parent families to other family types and the present study compares cohabitation to other family types. In contrast, Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2002) found that there was no evidence to indicate that parenting practices mediated the links between family structure and children's outcomes. This study also differs from the present study.

The social control variables suggest that whatever the difference is in delinquency between two-biological-parent families and cohabitating families, the family structure is only important in so much as it is related to the dimensions of parenting. In other words, cohabitating families that are able to provide monitoring, attachment, and involvement are no worse off in terms of risk of delinquency than any other family type. Family structure does not matter as long as families exhibit signs of parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment.

It is interesting to also note that some measures of social control explain delinquency better than others. The results that social control measures generally relate to delinquency are consistent with findings from previous studies, especially when considering parental monitoring and involvement. For example, Hoeve et al. (2009) found that delinquency is reduced by parental monitoring. Keijsers et al. (2010) found that when a parent is more involved in a child's life, this leads to less delinquency. However, whereas parental monitoring, involvement, and attachment significantly related to both delinquency outcomes, parental supervision did not. One explanation for this is that much of the effect may be captured in the other parental social control variables. This could account for the difference in the parental supervision variable when compared to the other social control variables.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, there are limitations as to how the different family structures are constituted. The public data did not contain very many cases in the single-father category. Therefore, the single mother and single father categories were collapsed into one category called single parent. It would be advantageous to keep the two categories separate in order to provide more points of contrast. Also, the data do not contain information

pertaining to marriage. They do not specify if the mother and father figure in any family type are legally married. This would have been useful information to have.

Similarly, another limitation is that there were very few cases of cohabitating family types. Only 2.3% of respondents reported living in a cohabitating family. This is a relatively small number of cases. The results may have turned out differently if there would have been more reported cases of adolescents living in cohabitating family types. This may explain why there was only a marginal significance found. Future research should focus on incorporating more cohabitating family types into the family structure variables.

Next, regional differences in nonviolent and violent delinquency were not accounted for in the public data set. It is not possible to compare one region against another with this public data set. It would have been interesting to see if delinquency rates vary among adolescents in different regions throughout the United States. Future research could include regional differences. Research should be conducted to examine if differences in the type of nonviolent and violent delinquency vary by region.

A final limitation is that the survey is school-based. Those who are most delinquent may have dropped out of school and some of the most important participants may be missing. This could account for there not being any significance pertaining to violent delinquency.

Policy Implications

This study shows that when social control variables are employed in the models, differences in delinquency rates by family structure are reduced. This research indicates that policies aimed to reduce crime by focusing on keeping families intact may be better served to strive to improve parenting practices, especially attachment, monitoring, and involvement. One way to do this would be to have parenting workshops aimed to improve relationships with their

children or workshops on how to better monitor and supervise children. Another way would be to hold conferences or retreats for parents and children to attend that are geared at encouraging parents and children alike to become involved in each other's lives. This would also help parents monitor their children better. These are just a few policies that could be implemented to help parents better monitor and supervise their children and be more involved in their lives.

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